

# Executive Summary

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## INTRODUCTION

The summaries that follow are drawn from *The Lexington We Want: Comprehensive Plan, First Four Elements*, approved by the Planning Board in January 2002. That document provides a broad statement of collective intentions about the kind of Town that those involved want Lexington to be. It both frames overarching policy and outlines specific actions for implementation. This work builds upon a strong planning legacy that reaches from the Town's pioneering planning and zoning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the contemporary *Lexington 2020* planning process. Over that entire period Lexington's growth and change have been guided thoughtfully and creatively in a process to which the preparation of these four elements is one more contribution. This effort will be followed by many others, most immediately by preparation of the remaining elements included in the current statutory outline of what constitutes a comprehensive plan.

This work has been carried out under the direction of the Planning Board, assisted by a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) created by the Board, and supported by staff and consultants. It is important to note that this *Plan* isn't a law or regulation or a commitment to funding or organizational change, but it does provide guidance for all of those, reflecting agreement about intentions among those charged with carrying out the *Plan*.

The Lexington which people want has been revealed in many ways through this planning work, importantly including a range of public activities ranging from smaller focus group meetings to larger evening forums. There is a healthy diversity of views on the particulars of that future vision, but there is a clear thread on which there is wide agreement. Strikingly, the "Town-Wide Vision Statement" for the Lexington of 2020 as earlier articulated by the Lexington 2020 Core Participants Group would equally well stand as a Vision for this work on the *Comprehensive Plan*. That congruence in values expressed provides an affirmation for both efforts.

Summaries of four *Comprehensive Plan* elements follow: Land Use, Natural and Cultural Resources, Housing and Economic Development. Each begins with a discussion of background information, then describes goals and objectives, and an agenda of implementing actions to be taken or at least explored. Some actions by their nature appear in multiple elements: much of the Land Use element is an abbreviated restatement of initiatives more fully outlined in the other three elements. There similarly will be convergence between some items in these elements and items not yet developed in the four elements still to come. No plan of this kind is ever "Final." The process of thoughtful and creative planning guidance will continue to evolve even after completion of the remaining elements.

## **LAND USE**

### **BACKGROUND**

Lexington's land use pattern reflects the history of the town's growth as a classic suburban community with a commercial center around a historic railroad depot, compact residential development near the center, and lower density residential development elsewhere. Highway oriented R&D areas, neighborhood commercial sub-centers, and scattered protected open spaces complete the picture.

Lexington's land use pattern is fully established, so land use issues now center on succession uses involving redevelopment and intensification. Only about 600 acres remain in undeveloped parcels out of a total town area of about 10,000 acres. That land could accommodate about 900 dwelling units under current zoning, but substantial amounts of it is likely to be put to other uses, such as protected open space.

There is essentially no vacant land in Lexington Center, but intensification of existing uses is possible within the limits of zoning, particularly if supported by structured parking. Only a limited amount of further commercial development is possible in outlying commercial areas, but much more would become feasible if dimensional rules were altered.

In addition to completely undeveloped parcels, about 400 “underdeveloped sites” have been identified, of which about 150 have been characterized as being “conspicuously” underdeveloped. Of those 150 sites, 35 have been studied as being the most vulnerable to development (see Table “Categorization of Study Sites” and Map “Desired Future Outcomes of Under and Undeveloped Land”). There are few incentives to encourage appropriate development for these parcels, and there will never be enough funding to acquire them all as Town open space. Therefore a strategy combining regulatory tools, development incentives, and acquisition is needed to appropriately guide use of these vulnerable lands.

### **GOALS AND ACTIONS**

Land use goals flow from the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Housing to support the social and economic diversity of Lexington.
- Economic development consistent with other Town values, including tax revenue, services for residents, employment, and sense of place.
- Acquisition and preservation of open space.
- Protection and promotion of the character and beauty of the community.
- Land uses that have a thoughtful and responsible relationship to local and regional resources. Implementation intends reliance on a range of means including incentives and market

- opportunities rather than relying only on regulation, managing rather than stopping development, in an exemplary open, accessible, and strategic process as urged by *Vision 2020*.
- Encourage development that supports the existing mature land use patterns. Changes in existing zoning districts should be marginal at most. These are among the actions intended to accomplish that.
  - Assure that creation of flexible Planned Commercial (CD) and Planned Residential (RD) districts advance the intentions of this *Plan*, in both cases working with other Town bodies such as the Conservation Commission and the Historical Commission to facilitate meeting Lexington's goals in their areas of responsibility.
  - In the disposition of “surplus” land, give priority to the uses for which land is essential: diversity-serving housing and the preservation of open space.
  - Seek opportunities to improve the speed and predictability of regulatory decisions.
- Give priority attention to actions serving multiple Plan elements.
  - Facilitate mixed uses where appropriate, such as housing uses in Lexington Center and more versatile commercial development to serve neighborhoods.
  - Manage land uses to reduce dependence on the automobile.
  - Seek to protect at least a third of Lexington's remaining open land through the Community Preservation Act or other means.
  - Develop incentives to encourage cluster housing development.
  - Consider provisions to control the adverse effects of out-of-scale houses, where appropriate.
- Maintain an overview of land use change and review these goals and implementation strategies to meet changing conditions.

### CATEGORIZATION OF STUDY SITES

Of the potentially buildable sites remaining within the town of Lexington, close to 400 of these sites were identified as undeveloped or under-developed sites based on market and zoning norms. Thirty-five private sites considered to be the most vulnerable to development were selected for further analysis. This allowed a general, conceptual test of development and preservation strategies. By employing a variety of regulatory strategies, portions of sites such as these could be preserved while allowing thoughtful development on the remaining portion. The above chart describes and defines the categories used for this analysis. These sites are shown on the “Desired Future Outcomes of Under- and Undeveloped Land” map on the page to follow. The idea was to reflect what the characteristics seem to tell us about this remaining land, rather than to suggest or impose a site-specific regulatory or development status on any given parcel.

### CATEGORIZATION OF STUDY SITES (Special Test Cases)

Category	Number of sites	Acres	Description
Critical Preservation	8	137	Designated for preservation rather than development. Taken directly from the Lexington Open Space Plan, highest priority acquisition category.
Highly Sensitive – Open Space Residential (zoning amendment needed)	12	230	Residential use possible, but only with clustered housing and lowest feasible densities, as well as preservation of highest quality open space that exceeds minimum requirements. Needs an enhanced preservation tool for highly sensitive sites that are not practical for acquisition.
Cluster usually preferred	11	181	Benefits accrue from clustering, but with less of an imperative than for above cases. Cluster provisions as they now stand are adequate to accommodate this category of development.
Innovation sites	4	32	Complex opportunities, possibly including mixed use, with widely varying combinations of residential and commercial or office activity closely fitted to the particular site(s). Locations must be chosen with care, scaled (down) to Lexington character and possibly linked to transit, where possible. Enhanced regulatory tools might be needed, or, at a minimum, some amendments to the use regulations in zoning.
Total	35	581	All sites are constrained by environmental, locational, or cultural concerns.

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

### BACKGROUND

Lexington enjoys unique national significance based on its role in the battle for independence, and its broad legacy of cultural resources. That, plus the Town's environmentally sensitive location at the headwaters of three river basins, provides extraordinary benefit to those who live here, both directly in improving the quality of life, and indirectly, such as through drawing visitors who support the local economy. However, having those special natural and cultural resources also carries important stewardship responsibilities, and those responsibilities have importantly shaped all elements of this *Plan*.

Lexington's richness of cultural resources isn't limited to those of the Revolutionary period. A nine-volume inventory of the Town's cultural resources includes many from the relatively recent past that have national significance, such as those found on Moon Hill, while others play a vital role in what makes neighborhoods special for those who live in them. Stewardship for those more local resources also are of critical importance. Similarly, about 1,400 acres within the Town have been protected as permanent open space, not all of it of broad regional significance, but all of it important in supporting both regional and larger environmental objectives and the local quality of life.

The Town has strong institutional resources through which to manage its resources. The LEXINGTON HISTORICAL COMMISSION sponsored the inventory cited above, looks after the preservation of those inventoried buildings, and can inhibit their demolition for up to six months. The HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION regulates work done to visible portions of building exteriors and their settings within four designated areas where the buildings have special historic or architectural significance. General advice can be offered also by The DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE, the LEXINGTON CENTER COMMITTEE, the LEXINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY and the NATIONAL HERITAGE MUSEUM, all of which play important advisory and educational roles. The NATIONAL PARK SERVICE owns, administers, and protects property within the Old Battle Road District of the Minuteman National Historic Park.

The CONSERVATION COMMISSION administers state laws pertaining to the important water resources of Lexington: the Wetlands Protection Act, Department of Environmental Protection's stormwater requirements, and the MA River Protection Act. Local environmental controls include the Town's Wetlands Bylaw, a recently adopted tree protection bylaw, and a number of provisions within the Town's Zoning By-Law. The CITIZENS FOR LEXINGTON CONSERVATION and the LEXINGTON STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE, as well as the LEXINGTON NATURE TRUST and other local trusts provide private protection assistance.

### GOALS AND ACTIONS

The Town's natural and cultural resource goals and intentions have some important aspirations in common: beauty, sustainability, and regional interrelations are critical for both as the Town seeks to sustain, protect, and enhance its resources, doing so efficiently and fairly, balancing

growth and maintenance of its valuable existing resources. These are among the actions intended.

- Reduce encroachment on natural resources.
  - Open space protection is a critical need, with the intention of protecting at least a third of the Town’s remaining uncommitted land. This can be done in part through regulation, such as stronger requirements for open space provision in subdivisions, transfer of development rights, and fees for open space mitigation. Gaining policy assurance of adequate funding for the local share of the cost of key acquisitions is also critical.
  - Protection of natural resources through “green building” bonuses and strengthened performance-based zoning controls is to be explored.
- Moderate auto usage.

Mixed land use, if supported in ways as discussed in other elements, can materially reduce auto trip numbers and length. Strengthening transportation demand management through site design, facilitation of alternative modes usage and creation of a regional transportation management organization can lend further support. These concepts will be more extensively addressed in this coming year’s Comprehensive Plan elements, especially Transportation.

- Address pollution and other natural resource concerns.

The Town itself could provide an example to businesses, residents, and other civic uses by demonstrating how cost-effective strengthened resource efficiency and waste reduction can be while also conserving resources. More could be done to handle solid waste disposal and greywater (wastewater) disposal in resource-protective ways. Exploration of organizational structure and leadership is called for to guide that and other new environmental efforts and to support programs already in place.

- Celebrate the Town’s place in National history.

Efforts would include providing visual definition for the entrances to Lexington (such as Massachusetts Avenue, Route 2A, Route 2, Bedford Street, and others) for travelers, both local and visiting. A “Battle Road Corridor” overlay district could be established to highlight the entire Battle Road through Lexington, perhaps in an effort linked with adjoining Battle Road towns.

- Address Other Cultural Resource Concerns

To provide coherent guidance for the Town’s cultural resource preservation efforts, a Town-wide Preservation Plan should be developed. These are among the items it would organize into an integrated program.

- Adaptive re-use of historic buildings, including valued twentieth century buildings such as schools, picturesque service stations, storefronts, and the like, conserving the Town's local cultural resources.
- Public education and signage programs relating to the character of the Town as it has grown over the two hundred and twenty-seven years since the first battle of the Revolution. The Town's scenic roads, neighborhoods (such as Woodhaven, Moon Hill, Five Fields, the Manor, Peacock Farm, Follen Hill), and conservation lands having historic significance (Paint Mine, old farm lands) would be more clearly identified to the public.
- Strengthened zoning incentives and controls and further refined demolition controls are to be developed to better protect and preserve neighborhood character, topographic features, and archaeological resources.
- Funding mechanisms for cultural (historic) and natural resources are to be explored. Local tax policies can provide both “carrots” and “sticks,” and programs such as the Community Preservation Act can help to redistribute some private money with considerable augmentation by state funds.

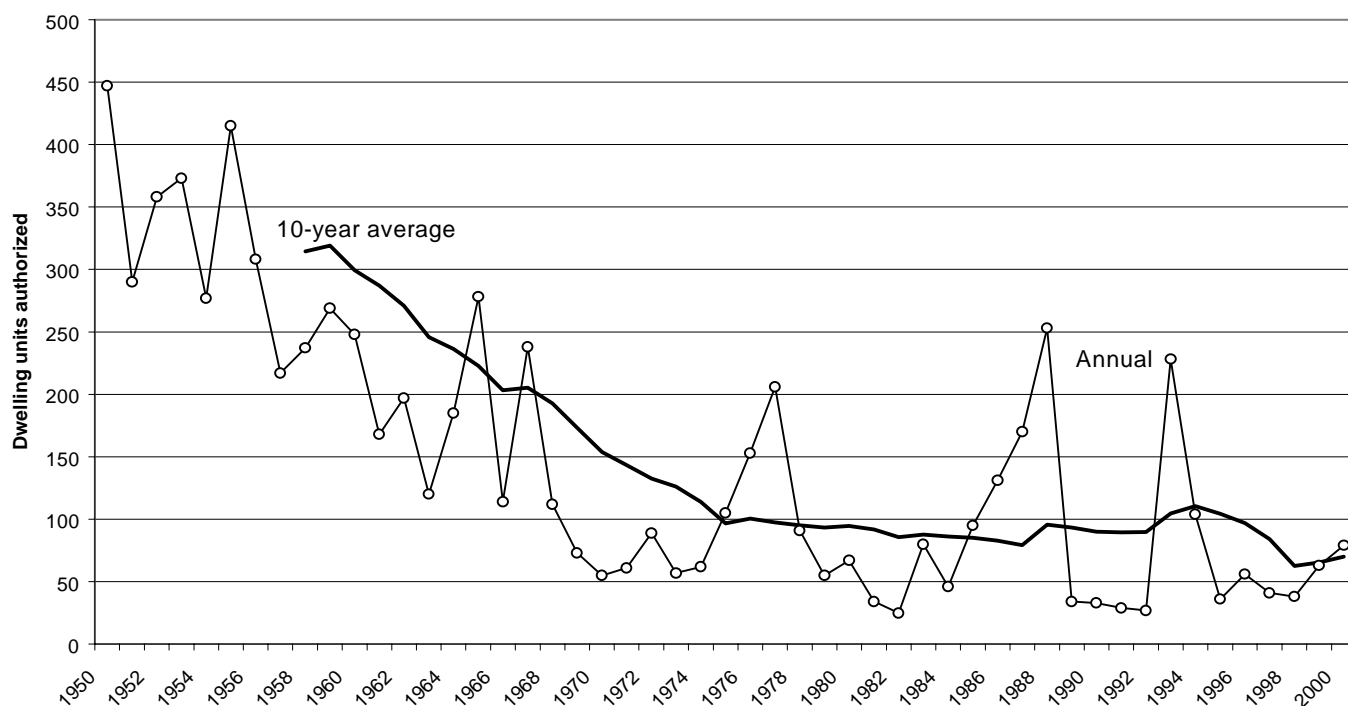
## HOUSING

### BACKGROUND

As a mature suburb, Lexington has limited potential for new housing development. However, because of strong demand in the regional housing market and Lexington's position in that market, new housing development is likely to continue on scattered small parcels of remaining undeveloped land (see Chart "Homebuilding: Lexington 1950 – 2000"). In addition, re-development of existing housing stock is also likely to continue -- involving replacement of smaller houses and renovation and additions to other existing properties (see Chart "Housing Construction: Lexington Existing and Projected." "Alternate" reflects aggressive open space efforts and facilitation of accessory dwellings). These trends are contributing to demographic changes making Lexington a community more stratified in income, with an older population in smaller households than is common in other communities.

### HOMEBUILDING

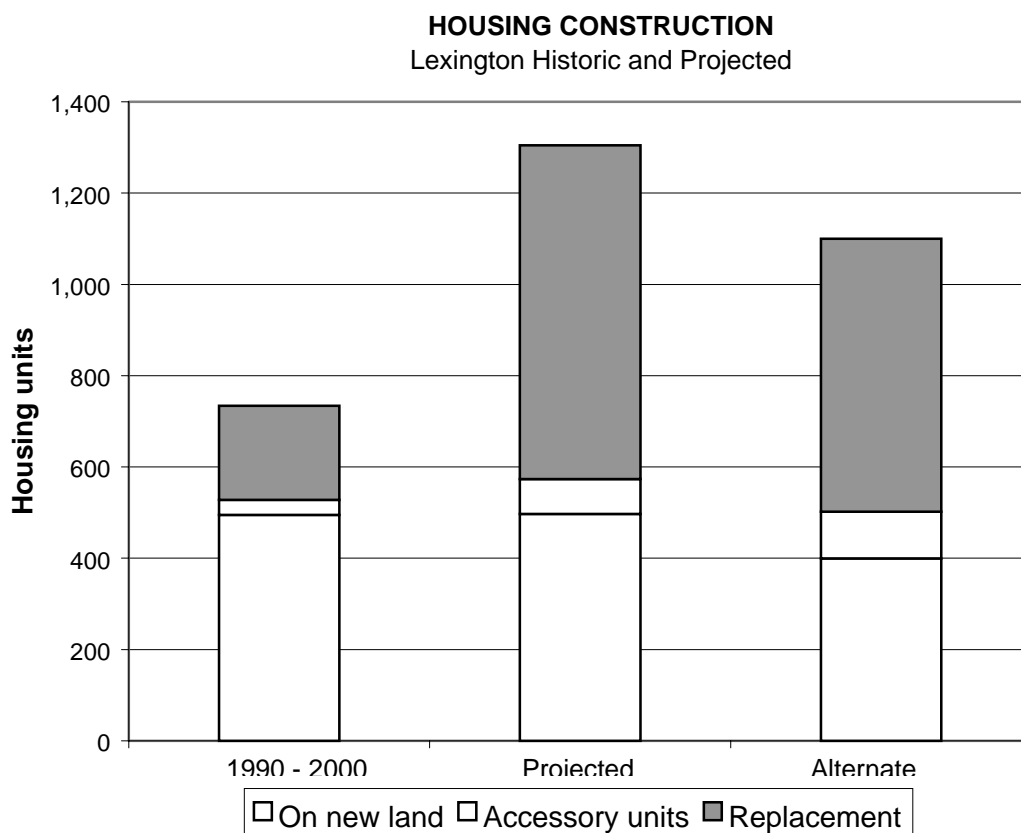
Lexington 1950-2000



HOMEBUILDING 1950 – 2000

Lexington's vacant unprotected land supply has dwindled tremendously in the last fifty years, leaving the town with less than 1,000 acres for residential development. A strong program of land conservation has also affected this downward curve in vacant lots. The trend in homebuilding today is the teardown of older homes on existing lots to make room for new modern replacement homes, because new land is minimally available. This trend will continue as more vacant land is used.





**HOUSING CONSTRUCTION: Lexington Historic and Projected**

In recent years, nearly half of all building permits issued have been for replacement housing, as well as for construction of accessory units in existing homes. As the little existing land remaining in Lexington is used for residential construction, the trend of teardowns and replacements will remain constant, if not increase. The demand for housing in Lexington continues to be strong. The graph illustrates the breakdown of housing units constructed in the last ten years in comparison with those units projected to be built in the future. The units shown in the 'alternate' column represent what might be built assuming more aggressive open space protection, support for creation of accessory units, and a demolition rate based on the historic trend of the last eight years.

Lexington seeks to have a socially and economically diverse community, both over the whole of the community and within its neighborhoods. In support of that fundamental social goal, a basic housing goal is to provide housing opportunities supportive of the population diversity we seek. This will require attention both to the needs of lower income groups and also to the needs of a growing segment of middle income households who also are being priced out of Lexington. The potential beneficiaries of our efforts to accommodate diversity are not only those who otherwise could not live here but are all of us, enriched by having a more complete community for ourselves and for our families. We need to achieve that diversity of opportunity through appropriate means – without sacrificing the qualities of existing residential environs through unreasonable density departures, introduction of disruptive traffic or other impacts, or building in a way that is inconsistent with its context.

Although Lexington has long enjoyed a reputation as a town that actively seeks to guide change to serve goals of community diversity and housing opportunity, responding to these recent socio-economic changes is increasingly difficult to accomplish because of the Town's now-modest growth potential. Change through trends in occupancy of existing units will be a far more significant determinant of population diversity than can be achieved through shaping the relatively small increment of new construction that is projected.

## GOALS AND ACTIONS

Lexington will have about 12,000 housing units at "build-out," an increase of fewer than 1,000 units. While this planning process has not resulted in firm quantitative goals for the housing profile that is wanted, the directions wanted are clear:

- The proportion of housing made affordable to households otherwise priced out of Lexington would preferably be larger, serving not only the elderly but also families, including, but not limited, to young adults. Housing that is "affordable" as the State defines it might grow from the present 7% of Lexington's housing stock to the State's objective of 10% of all units being affordable. Half of that "affordable" housing might serve families, compared with less than 40% that does so at present.
- The share of housing that serves renters would preferably be not lower than at present, and ideally somewhat larger. One fifth of all housing might be available to renters, compared with about 17% at present.

It is not possible to achieve those objectives only by shaping the limited number of units to be added within the "build-out." Efforts to include more affordable housing in the new development that occurs must be complemented by policies designed to affect the affordability of existing housing.

This approach suggests actions implementing the following strategies:

1. *Broaden opportunities for producing housing, especially where that production is likely to include housing that is relatively affordable and that is likely to serve other diversity concerns, such as serving small households.* Actions may take the form of allowing housing in the Center and other potential mixed-use districts and allowing higher density near good transportation
2. *Protect existing housing that is important for the maintenance of diversity.* Over time, demolition and replacement is eroding the Town's once-rich diversity of housing, steadily reducing the number of small freestanding single-family dwellings as a significant Lexington resource for affordability, and producing a "monoculture" of new housing comprised of only large, expensive new homes. Actions may take the form of mitigation requirements for houses that are large for their lots, and demolition delay requirements that might slow the process of change.

3. *Assure that new development doesn't indirectly exacerbate the housing problem.* Actions may take the form of incentives and/or requirements to include affordable housing in new development.
4. *Support homeowner's efforts to afford their housing costs by liberalizing policies controlling the use of the home as workplace.*
5. *Develop sources of funding to support housing affordability.* Actions might include participation in the regional housing consortium, passage of the Community Preservation Act, and development of a program for first-time buyers in conjunction with local banks.
6. *Strengthen groups, institutions and alliances that can promote, facilitate, or carry out the development of the kinds of housing that the town wants which the market is not now providing.* Actions might include establishment of a local nonprofit developer or housing partnership or improvements in the permitting process for affordable housing developments.

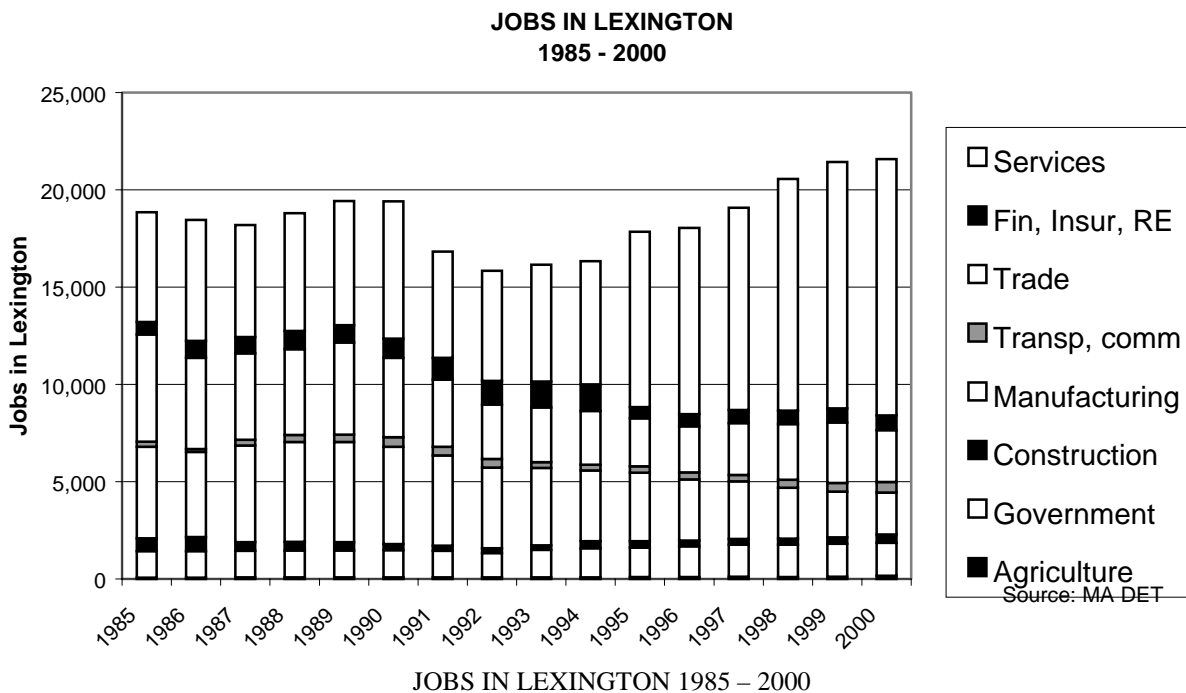
## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### BACKGROUND

Traditionally, economic development has centered on job creation, while more recently the search for job growth has been motivated by concerns over municipal finances. Economic development efforts have often been questioned by some residents who view the negative impacts of business activity, most particularly traffic congestion, as threatening to quality of life in the Town.

Lexington has about 20,000 local jobs, which is about a third more than the number of job-holding residents in the town. Despite that, the great majority of Lexington residents commute out of town for work. In 1990, only 24% of Lexington's workers held jobs within Lexington.

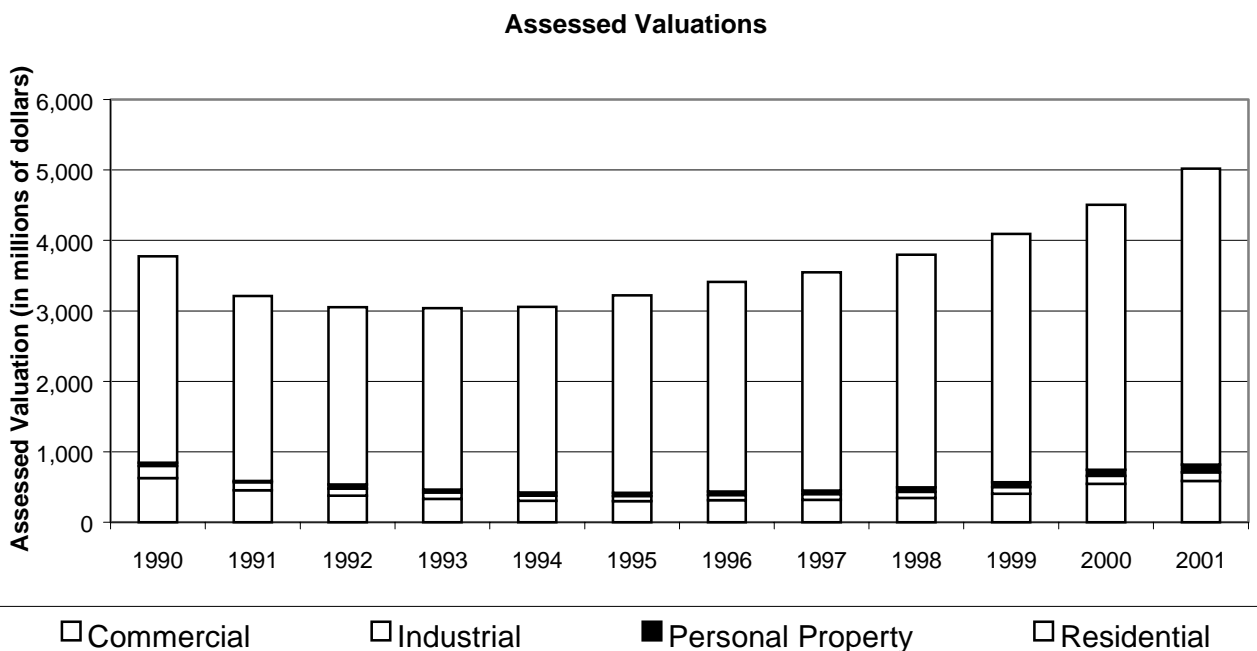
Types and locations of jobs in Lexington have changed dramatically over the years (see Chart, "Jobs in Lexington, 1985 – 2000"). Jobs in wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing have declined while jobs in technical and professional services have grown. Jobs in Lexington Center have probably declined, while employment along Hayden and Hartwell Avenues has grown.



Types and locations of jobs in Lexington have changed dramatically over the years despite relatively modest overall change in the total number of jobs. Changes in the regional economy account for the difference in the number of jobs available since 1985. However, individual industries, such as manufacturing, have significantly declined. Retail and wholesale trade have also declined dramatically, but growth in technical and professional services has offset the change.

Lexington's retail sales and services are of special significance. They not only provide jobs and fiscal support, but also offer a valued service to residents. Retailing visibly shapes the perceived character of the community. Retail sales in Lexington fell by nearly a quarter between 1987 and 1997, falling to less than half the statewide level of sales per capita. Residents' shopping needs are increasingly being met in other communities. The result is not distressed real estate, but rather is changing land use patterns. Land on Bedford Street, where residents formerly bought lumber, now holds more employees, but they work in offices providing services.

Business property has paid about a quarter of the Lexington tax levy over the last decade or more. Lexington applies a higher tax rate to business than to dwellings, and in doing so has reduced the fiscal swings that otherwise would have resulted from commercial real estate value fluctuations (see Chart, "Assessed Valuations"). In 1990, the non-residential share of assessed valuations was 22%, but by 1997 that had fallen to less than 13% as residential property values boomed and total business property values declined.

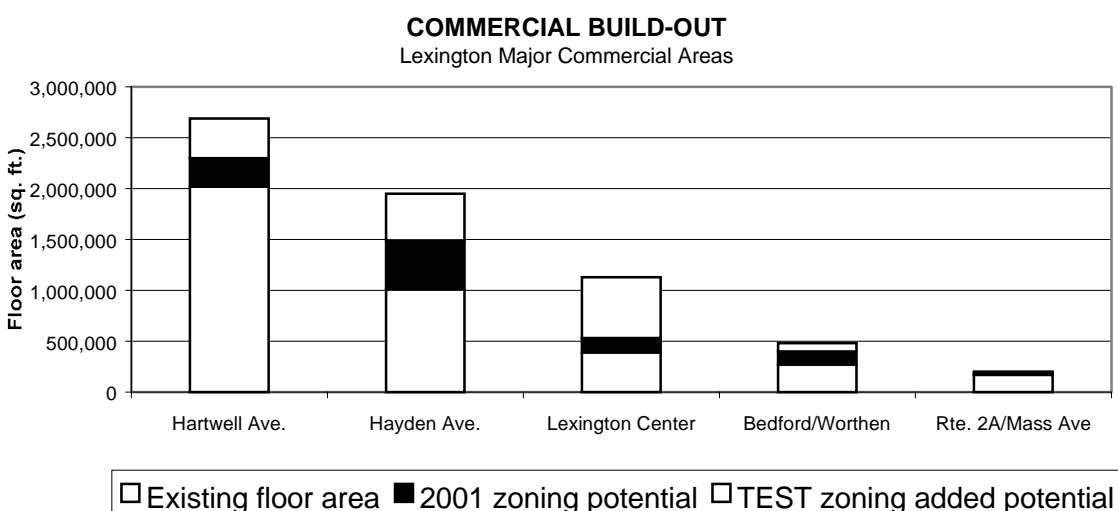


#### ASSESSED VALUATIONS

Clearly, residential taxes account for the majority of Lexington's tax levy. Commercial properties account for approximately one quarter of the tax levy in Lexington, a figure much lower than surrounding communities. However, despite their smaller representation, businesses are taxed at a higher rate than residential properties to buffer real estate fluctuations within the residential market.

The municipal expense of servicing business is less than the taxes business pays. Because of that, growth in local business helps to reduce the residential share of the tax levy. However, the possibility of taking advantage of business growth is limited by availability of land and the rules the Town has chosen for controlling such development.

Business commonly occupies about 10% or less of a community's developed land area. Of Lexington's 11,000 acres of land, 8% is zoned for business. Many parcels now developed for business still have substantial expansion capacity remaining within zoning limits. Nearly 4 million square feet of business floor area exists, while another one million square feet of floor area could be added under current zoning. That is enough to accommodate another 4,000 jobs. In the Center, the key limitation on the ability for business floor area to expand is parking requirements. Elsewhere, the key limitation on added business development is the allowed ratio of building floor area to lot area, or "FAR." As theoretical tests of future land use potential, increasing allowable FAR by 50% in outlying business districts and removing on-site parking requirements in the Center would more than double the potential that otherwise exists for new business development in Lexington, as revealed by modeling a "TEST" growth scenario (see Chart, "Commercial Build-Out, Lexington Major Commercial Areas").



COMMERCIAL BUILD-OUT: Lexington major commercial areas

A build-out is a planning exercise often found to be useful in comprehensive plans. As a test of long range development impact for a given land use, it provides a theoretical profile of what ultimately could be built under current zoning and/or alternate zoning scenarios. Approximately eight percent of Lexington's land is zoned for business. About 4.5 million square feet of land has been developed and little vacant land exists within the five nodes. However, many businesses have room to expand under current zoning. Assuming a constant floor area per job, 4,000 jobs could be created with the additional one million square feet of floor area. This chart shows by commercial node location the existing floor area as well as the total floor area that could be built under current zoning regulations. The category called "Test zoning-added potential" refers to theoretical changes to the current zoning if Lexington chose to increase commercial use intensity. The first condition of this test zoning includes the theoretical elimination of the requirement for on-site parking in Lexington Center. The second condition calls for an increase to a 50% allowable FAR. All other zoning laws would remain the same.

Lexington has a strong capacity for directing its own economic future, given high demand for location here and already powerful zoning and land use tools. The Town has exercised that capacity in the past with decisions regarding the Center, and with the creation of large lot industrial/office space, but excluding retail on Hayden and Hartwell.

## GOALS AND ACTIONS

Four goals stand out as the reasons for the Town to engage in economic development.

- Provide fiscal support necessary for the high level of public services residents of Lexington seek; a strong local economy can help.
- As some but not all of the businesses here do strongly, provide important services and employment opportunities for Lexington residents
- Provide nearby jobs easily accessible to Lexington residents, important especially for some whose mobility or time is limited
- Strengthen Lexington's sense of place and community

Specific implementation actions, stated here in barest summary, include these.

- Encourage economic development in ways that moderate auto usage and promote accessibility to jobs and services for Lexington residents:
  - Broaden allowed use of homes for work as well as living, reflecting new economic trends and technologies
  - Explore revising zoning to allow residential use in Lexington Center.
  - Review zoning to identify impediments to mixed use elsewhere.
  - Modernize CN District regulations; neighborhood stores, by definition, provide accessibility by being near the residents they serve.
  - Adopt a requirement that no large trip-producing use shall be allowed unless a showing can be made that the trips the use will generate will be below that customarily expected from that type of use.
  - Explore transit-oriented design rules for commercial and industrial districts, especially those along Hartwell and Hayden Avenues.
- Strengthen Lexington Center's retail service function through actions such as these.
  - The Economic Development Office and others should be further supported in focusing their efforts to support Center businesses of the kind being sought.
  - Ease the inadvertent regulatory impediments to changing between categories of use in the Center, which discourage retailing in favor of non-retail uses.